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**ONE HUNDRED POEMS
OF KABIR**

ONE HUNDRED POEMS OF KABIR

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LONDON
MACMILLAN & CO LTD

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First Edition February 1915

*Reprinted September 1915, 1918, 1921, 1923, 1926,
1929, 1934, 1943, 1945, 1948, 1954*

Reset and Reprinted 1961

MAGMILLAN AND COMPANY LIMITED
London Bombay Calcutta Madras Melbourne

UNESCO COLLECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS:
INDIAN SERIES

*This work has been accepted in the Indian Series of the Unesco
Collection of Translations, jointly sponsored by the United
Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO), and the Indian National Commission for Unesco*

MADE IN INDIA AT THE I.S.S.D. PRESS, MADRAS 2

..INTRODUCTION ~~~

THE poet Kabir, a selection from whose songs is here for the first time offered to English readers, is one of the most interesting personalities in the history of Indian mysticism. Born in or near Benares, of Mohammedan parents, and probably about the year 1440, he became in early life a disciple of the celebrated Hindu ascetic Rāmānanda. Rāmānanda had brought to Northern India the religious revival which Rāmānuja, the great twelfth-century reformer of Brāhmanism, had initiated in the South. This revival was in part a reaction against the increasing formalism of the orthodox

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cult, in part an assertion of the demands of the heart as against the intense intellectualism of the Vedānta philosophy, the exaggerated monism which that philosophy proclaimed. It took in Rāmānuja's preaching the form of an ardent personal devotion to the God Vishnu, as representing the personal aspect of the Divine Nature: that mystical 'religion of love' which everywhere makes its appearance at a certain level of spiritual culture, and which creeds and philosophies are powerless to kill.

Though such a devotion is indigenous in Hinduism, and finds expression in many passages of the Bhagavad Gītā, there was in its mediæval revival a large element of syncretism. Rāmānanda, through whom its spirit is said to have reached Kabir, appears to have been a man

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of wide religious culture, and full of missionary enthusiasm. Living at the moment in which the impassioned poetry and deep philosophy of the great Persian mystics, Attār, Sādī, Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī, and Hāfiz, were exercising a powerful influence on the religious thought of India, he dreamed of reconciling this intense and personal Mohammedan mysticism with the traditional theology of Brāhmanism. Some have regarded both these great religious leaders as influenced also by Christian thought and life: but as this is a point upon which competent authorities hold widely divergent views, its discussion is not attempted here. We may safely assert, however, that in their teachings, two—perhaps three—apparently antagonistic streams of intense spiritual culture met, as Jewish and Hellenistic thought met in the early Christian

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Church: and it is one of the outstanding characteristics of Kabir's genius that he was able in his poems to fuse them into one.

A great religious reformer, the founder of a sect to which nearly a million northern Hindus still belong, it is yet supremely as a mystical poet that Kabir lives for us. His fate has been that of many revealers of Reality. A hater of religious exclusivism, and seeking above all things to initiate men into the liberty of the children of God, his followers have honoured his memory by re-erecting in a new place the barriers which he laboured to cast down. But his wonderful songs survive, the spontaneous expressions of his vision and his love; and it is by these, not by the didactic teachings associated with his name, that he makes his immortal appeal to the heart. In these poems a wide

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range of mystical emotion is brought into play: from the loftiest abstractions, the most other-worldly passion for the Infinite, to the most intimate and personal realization of God, expressed in homely metaphors and religious symbols drawn indifferently from Hindu and Mohammedan belief. It is impossible to say of their author that he was Brāhman or Sūfī, Vedāntist or Vaishnavite. He is, as he says himself, 'at once the child of Allah and of Rām.' That Supreme Spirit Whom he knew and adored, and to Whose joyous friendship he sought to induct the souls of other men, transcended whilst He included all metaphysical categories, all credal definitions; yet each contributed something to the description of that Infinite and Simple Totality Who revealed Himself, according to their measure, to the faithful lovers of all creeds.

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Kabir's story is surrounded by contradictory legends, on none of which reliance can be placed. Some of these emanate from a Hindu, some from a Mohammedan source, and claim him by turns as a Sūfī and a Brāhman saint. His name, however, is practically a conclusive proof of Moslem ancestry: and the most probable tale is that which represents him as the actual or adopted child of a Mohammedan weaver of Benares, the city in which the chief events of his life took place.

In fifteenth-century Benares the syncretistic tendencies of Bhakti religion had reached full development. Sūfis and Brāhmans appear to have met in disputation: the most spiritual members of both creeds frequenting the teachings of Rāmānanda, whose reputation was then at its height. The boy Kabir, in whom the religious

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passion was innate, saw in Rāmānanda his destined teacher; but knew how slight were the chances that a Hindu guru would accept a Mohammedan as disciple. He therefore hid upon the steps of the river Ganges, where Rāmānanda was accustomed to bathe; with the result that the master, coming down to the water, trod upon his body unexpectedly, and exclaimed in his astonishment, ‘Rām! Rām!’—the name of the incarnation under which he worshipped God. Kabīr then declared that he had received the mantra of initiation from Rāmānanda’s lips, and was by it admitted to discipleship. In spite of the protests of orthodox Brāhmans and Mohammedans, both equally annoyed by this contempt of theological landmarks, he persisted in his claim; thus exhibiting in action that very principle of religious synthesis which Rāmānanda had sought

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to establish in thought. Rāmānanda appears to have accepted him, and though Mohammedan legends speak of the famous Sūfī Pīr, Takkī of Jhansi, as Kabīr's master in later life, the Hindu saint is the only human teacher to whom in his songs he acknowledges indebtedness.

The little that we know of Kabīr's life contradicts many current ideas concerning the Oriental mystic. Of the stages of discipline through which he passed, the manner in which his spiritual genius developed, we are completely ignorant. He seems to have remained for years the disciple of Rāmānanda, joining in the theological and philosophical arguments which his master held with all the great Mullahs and Brāhmans of his day; and to this source we may perhaps trace his acquaintance with the terms of Hindu and Sūfī philosophy.

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He may or may not have submitted to the traditional education of the Hindu or the Sūfī contemplative: it is clear, at any rate, that he never adopted the life of the professional ascetic, or retired from the world in order to devote himself to bodily mortifications and the exclusive pursuit of the contemplative life. Side by side with his interior life of adoration, its artistic expression in music and words—for he was a skilled musician as well as a poet—he lived the sane and diligent life of the Oriental craftsman. All the legends agree on this point: that Kabīr was a weaver, a simple and unlettered man, who earned his living at the loom. Like Paul the tent-maker, Boehme the cobbler, Bunyan the tinker, Tersteegen the ribbon-maker, he knew how to combine vision and industry; the work of his hands helped rather than

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hindered the impassioned meditation of his heart. Hating mere bodily austerities, he was no ascetic, but a married man, the father of a family—a circumstance which Hindu legends of the monastic type vainly attempt to conceal or explain—and it was from out of the heart of the common life that he sang his rapturous lyrics of divine love. Here his works corroborate the traditional story of his life. Again and again he extols the life of home, the value and reality of diurnal existence, with its opportunities for love and renunciation; pouring contempt upon the professional sanctity of the Yogi, who ‘has a great beard and matted locks, and looks like a goat,’ and on all who think it necessary to flee a world pervaded by love, joy, and beauty—the proper theatre of man’s quest—in order to find that One Reality Who

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has ‘spread His form of love throughout *all* the world.’¹

It does not need much experience of ascetic literature to recognize the boldness and originality of this attitude in such a time and place. From the point of view of orthodox sanctity, whether Hindu or Mohammedan, Kabir was plainly a heretic; and his frank dislike of all institutional religion, all external observance—which was as thorough and as intense as that of the Quakers themselves—completed, so far as ecclesiastical opinion was concerned, his reputation as a dangerous man. The ‘simple union’ with Divine Reality which he perpetually extolled, as alike the duty and the joy of every soul, was independent both of ritual and of bodily austerities; the God whom he proclaimed was ‘neither in Kaaba nor in Kailāsh.’

¹Cf. Poems Nos. XXI, XL, XLIII, LXVI, LXXVI.

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Those who sought Him needed not to go far; for He awaited discovery everywhere, more accessible to 'the washerwoman and the carpenter' than to the self-righteous holy man.¹ Therefore the whole apparatus of piety, Hindu and Moslem alike—the temple, and mosque, idol and holy water, scriptures and priests—were denounced by this inconveniently clear-sighted poet as mere substitutes for reality; dead things intervening between the soul and its love—

The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak:
I know, for I have cried aloud to them.
The Purāna and the Korān are mere words:
lifting up the curtain, I have seen.²

This sort of thing cannot be tolerated by any organized Church; and it is not surprising that Kabīr, having his head-quarters in Benares, the very

¹ Poems I, II, XLI.

² Poems XLII, LXV, LXVII.

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centre of priestly influence, was subjected to considerable persecution. The well-known legend of the beautiful courtesan sent by the Brāhmans to tempt his virtue, and converted, like the Magdalen, by her sudden encounter with the initiate of a higher love, preserves the memory of the fear and dislike with which he was regarded by the ecclesiastical powers. Once at least, after the performance of a supposed miracle of healing, he was brought before the Emperor Sikandar Lodī, and charged with claiming the possession of divine powers. But Sikandar Lodī, a ruler of considerable culture, was tolerant of the eccentricities of saintly persons belonging to his own faith. Kabīr, being of Moham-medan birth, was outside the authority of the Brāhmans, and technically classed with the Sūfis, to whom great theological latitude was allowed.

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Therefore, though he was banished in the interests of peace from Benares, his life was spared. This seems to have happened in 1495, when he was nearly sixty years of age; it is the last event in his career of which we have definite knowledge. Thenceforth he appears to have moved about amongst various cities of northern India, the centre of a group of disciples; continuing in exile that life of apostle and poet of love to which, as he declares in one of his songs, he was destined 'from the beginning of time.' In 1518, an old man, broken in health, and with hands so feeble that he could no longer make the music which he loved, he died at Maghar near Gorakhpur.

A beautiful legend tells us that after his death his Mohammedan and Hindu disciples disputed the possession of his body; which the Mohammedans

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wished to bury, the Hindus to burn. As they argued together, Kabir appeared before them, and told them to lift the shroud and look at that which lay beneath. They did so, and found in the place of the corpse a heap of flowers; half of which were buried by the Mohammedans at Maghar, and half carried by the Hindus to the holy city of Benares to be burned—fitting conclusion to a life which had made fragrant the most beautiful doctrines of two great creeds.

II

The poetry of mysticism might be defined on the one hand as a temperamental reaction to the vision of Reality: on the other, as a form of prophecy. As it is the special vocation of the mystical consciousness to

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mediate between two orders, going out in loving adoration towards God and coming home to tell the secrets of Eternity to other men; so the artistic self-expression of this consciousness has also a double character. It is love-poetry, but love-poetry which is often written with a missionary intention.

Kabir's songs are of this kind: outbursts at once of rapture and of charity. Written in the popular Hindī, not in the literary tongue, they were deliberately addressed—like the vernacular poetry of Jacopone da Todi and Richard Rolle—to the people rather than to the professionally religious class; and all must be struck by the constant employment in them of imagery drawn from the common life, the universal experience. It is by the simplest metaphors, by constant appeals to needs, passions, re-

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lations which all men understand—the bridegroom and bride, the guru and disciple, the pilgrim, the farmer, the migrant bird—that he drives home his intense conviction of the reality of the soul's intercourse with the Transcendent. There are in his universe no fences between the 'natural' and 'supernatural' worlds; everything is a part of the creative Play of God, and therefore—even in its humblest details—capable of revealing the Player's mind.

This willing acceptance of the here-and-now as a means of representing supernal realities is a trait common to the greatest mystics. For them, when they have achieved at last the true theopathic state, all aspects of the universe possess equal authority as sacramental declarations of the Presence of God; and their fearless employment of homely and physical

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symbols—often startling and even revolting to the unaccustomed taste—is in direct proportion to the exaltation of their spiritual life. The works of the great Sūfis, and amongst the Christians of Jacopone da Todi, Ruysbroeck, Boehme, abound in illustrations of this law. Therefore we must not be surprised to find in Kabir's songs—his desperate attempts to communicate his ecstasy and persuade other men to share it—a constant juxtaposition of concrete and metaphysical language; swift alternations between the most intensely anthropomorphic, the most subtly philosophical, ways of apprehending man's communion with the Divine. The need for this alternation, and its entire naturalness for the mind which employs it, is rooted in his concept, or vision, of the Nature of God; and unless we make some attempt to

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grasp this, we shall not go far in our understanding of his poems.

Kabīr belongs to that small group of supreme mystics—amongst whom St. Augustine, Ruysbroeck, and the Sūfī poet Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī are perhaps the chief—who have achieved that which we might call the synthetic vision of God. These have resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and impersonal, the transcendent and immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the Divine Nature; between the Absolute of philosophy and the 'sure true Friend' of devotional religion. They have done this, not by taking these apparently incompatible concepts one after the other; but by ascending to a height of spiritual intuition at which they are, as Ruysbroeck said, 'melted and merged in the Unity,' and perceived as the completing opposites of a per-

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fect Whole. This proceeding entails for them—and both Kabir and Ruysbroeck expressly acknowledge it—a universe of three orders: Becoming, Being, and that which is ‘More than Being,’ *i.e.* God.¹ God is here felt to be not the final abstraction, but the one actuality. He inspires, supports, indeed inhabits, both the durational, conditioned, finite world of Becoming and the unconditioned, non-successional, infinite world of Being; yet utterly transcends them both. He is the omnipresent Reality, the ‘All-pervading’ within Whom ‘the worlds are being told like beads.’ In His personal aspect He is the ‘beloved Fakir,’ teaching and companioning each soul. Considered as Immanent Spirit, He is ‘the Mind within the mind.’ But all these are at best partial aspects of His nature,

¹ Nos. VII and XLIX.

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mutually corrective: as the Persons in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity—to which this theological diagram bears a striking resemblance—represent different and compensating experiences of the Divine Unity within which they are resumed. As Ruysbroeck discerned a plane of reality upon which ‘we can speak no more of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but only of One Being, the very substance of the Divine Persons’; so Kabīr says that ‘beyond both the limited *and* the limitless is He, the Pure Being.’¹

Brahma, then, is the Ineffable Fact compared with which ‘the distinction of the Conditioned from the Unconditioned is but a word’: at once the utterly transcendent One of Absolutist philosophy, and the personal Lover of the individual soul—‘common to all

¹ No. VII.

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and special to each,' as one Christian mystic has it. The need felt by Kabir for both these ways of describing Reality is a proof of the richness and balance of his spiritual experience; which neither cosmic nor anthropomorphic symbols, taken alone, could express. More absolute than the Absolute, more personal than the human mind, Brahma therefore exceeds whilst He includes all the concepts of philosophy, all the passionate intuitions of the heart. He is the Great Affirmation, the fount of energy, the source of life and love, the unique satisfaction of desire. His creative word is the *Om* or 'Everlasting Yea.' The negative philosophy, which strips from the Divine Nature all Its attributes and—defining Him only by that which He is not—reduces Him to an 'Emptiness,' is abhorrent to this most vital of poets. Brahma, he says, 'may

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never be found in abstractions.' He is the One Love who pervades the world, discerned in His fullness only by the eyes of love; and those who know Him thus share, though they may never tell, the joyous and ineffable secret of the universe.¹

Now Kabīr, achieving this synthesis between the personal and cosmic aspects of the Divine Nature, eludes the three great dangers which threaten mystical religion.

First, he escapes the excessive emotionalism, the tendency to an exclusively anthropomorphic devotion, which results from an unrestricted cult of Divine Personality, especially under an incarnational form; seen in India in the exaggerations of Krishna worship, in Europe in the sentimental extravagances of certain Christian saints.

¹ Nos. VII, XXVI, LXXVI, XC.

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Next, he is protected from the soul-destroying conclusions of pure monism, inevitable if its logical implications are pressed home: that is, the identity of substance between God and the soul, with its corollary of the total absorption of that soul in the Being of God as the goal of the spiritual life. For the thorough-going monist the soul, in so far as it is real, is substantially identical with God; and the true object of existence is the making patent of this latent identity, the realization which finds expression in the Vedāntist formula 'That art thou.' But Kabīr says that Brahma and the creature are 'ever distinct, yet ever united'; that the wise man knows the spiritual as well as the material world to 'be no more than His footstool.'¹ The soul's union with Him is a love union, a mutual

¹ Nos. VII and IX.

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inhabitation; that essentially dualistic relation which all mystical religion expresses, not a self-mergence which leaves no place for personality. This eternal distinction, the mysterious union-in-separateness of God and the soul, is a necessary doctrine of all sane mysticism; for no scheme which fails to find a place for it can represent more than a fragment of that soul's intercourse with the spiritual world. Its affirmation was one of the distinguishing features of the Vaishnavite reformation preached by Rāmānuja; the principle of which had descended through Rāmānanda to Kabīr.

Last, the warmly human and direct apprehension of God as the supreme Object of love, the soul's comrade, teacher, and bridegroom, which is so passionately and frequently expressed in Kabīr's poems, balances and controls those abstract tendencies which

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are inherent in the metaphysical side of his vision of Reality: and prevents it from degenerating into that sterile worship of intellectual formulae which became the curse of the Vedāntist school. For the mere intellectualist, as for the mere pietist, he has little approbation.¹ Love is throughout his 'absolute sole Lord': the unique source of the more abundant life which he enjoys, and the common factor which unites the finite and infinite worlds. All is soaked in love: that love which he described in almost Johannine language as the 'Form of God.' The whole of creation is the Play of the Eternal Lover; the living, changing, growing expression of Brahma's love and joy. As these twin passions preside over the generation of human life, so 'beyond the mists of pleasure and pain,' Kabīr finds

¹ Cf. especially Nos. LIX, LXVII, LXXV, XC, XCI.

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them governing the creative acts of God. His manifestation is love; His activity is joy. Creation springs from one glad act of affirmation: the Everlasting Yea, perpetually uttered within the depths of the Divine Nature.¹ In accordance with this concept of the universe as a Love-Game which eternally goes forward, a progressive manifestation of Brahma—one of the many notions which he adopted from the common stock of Hindu religious ideas, and illuminated by his poetic genius—movement, rhythm, perpetual change, forms an integral part of Kabīr's vision of Reality. Though the Eternal and Absolute is ever present to his consciousness, yet his concept of the Divine Nature is essentially dynamic. It is by the symbols of motion that he most often tries to convey it to us: as in

¹ Nos. XVII, XXVI, LXXVI, LXXXII.

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his constant reference to dancing, or the strangely modern picture of that Eternal Swing of the Universe which is 'held by the cords of love.'¹

It is a marked characteristic of mystical literature that the great contemplatives, in their effort to convey to us the nature of their communion with the supersensuous, are inevitably driven to employ some form of sensuous imagery: coarse and inaccurate as they know such imagery to be, even at the best. Our normal human consciousness is so completely committed to dependence on the senses, that the fruits of intuition itself are instinctively referred to them. In that intuition it seems to the mystics that all the dim cravings and partial apprehensions of sense find perfect fulfilment. Hence their constant declaration that they *see* the

¹ No. XVI.

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uncreated light, they *hear* the celestial melody, they *taste* the sweetness of the Lord, they know an ineffable fragrance, they feel the very contact of love. 'Him verily seeing and fully feeling, Him spiritually hearing and Him delectably smelling and sweetly swallowing,' as Julian of Norwich has it. In those amongst them who develop psycho-sensorial automatisms these parallels between sense and spirit may present themselves to consciousness in the form of hallucinations: as the light seen by Suso, the music heard by Rolle, the celestial perfumes which filled St. Catherine of Siena's cell, the physical wounds felt by St. Francis and St. Teresa. These are excessive dramatizations of the symbolism under which the mystic tends instinctively to represent his spiritual intuition to the surface consciousness. Here, in the special sense-perception

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which he feels to be most expressive of Reality, his peculiar idiosyncrasies come out.

Now Kabir, as we might expect in one whose reactions to the spiritual order were so wide and various, uses by turn all the symbols of sense. He tells us that he has 'seen without sight' the effulgence of Brahma, tasted the divine nectar, felt the ecstatic contact of Reality, smelt the fragrance of the heavenly flowers. But he was essentially a poet and musician: rhythm and harmony were to him the garments of beauty and truth. Hence in his lyrics he shows himself to be, like Richard Rolle, above all things a musical mystic. Creation, he says again and again, is full of music: it is music. At the heart of the Universe 'white music is blossoming': love weaves the melody, whilst renunciation beats the time. It can be heard in

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the home as well as in the heavens; discerned by the ears of common men as well as by the trained senses of the ascetic. Moreover, the body of every man is a lyre on which Brahma, 'the source of all music,' plays. Everywhere Kabîr discerns the 'Unstruck Music of the Infinite'—that celestial melody which the angel played to St. Francis, that ghostly symphony which filled the soul of Rolle with ecstatic joy.¹ The one figure which he adopts from the Hindu Pantheon and constantly uses, is that of Krishna the Divine Flute Player.² He sees the supernal music, too, in its visual embodiment, as rhythmical movement: that mysterious dance of the universe before the face of Brahma, which is at once an act of worship and an

¹ Nos. XVII, XVIII, XXXIX, XLI, LIV, LXXVI, LXXXIII, LXXXIX, XCVII.

² Nos. L, LIII, LXVIII.

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expression of the infinite rapture of the Immanent God.¹

Yet in this wide and rapturous vision of the universe Kabir never loses touch with diurnal existence, never forgets the common life. His feet are firmly planted upon earth; his lofty and passionate apprehensions are perpetually controlled by the activity of a sane and vigorous intellect, by the alert common sense so often found in persons of real mystical genius. The constant insistence on simplicity and directness, the hatred of all abstractions and philosophizings,² the ruthless criticism of external religion: these are amongst his most marked characteristics. God is the Root whence all manifestations, 'material' and 'spiritual,' alike proceed; and God is the only need of

¹ Nos. XXVI, XXXII, LXXVI.

² Nos. LXXV, LXXVIII, LXXX, XC.

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man—‘happiness shall be yours when you come to the Root.’¹ Hence to those who keep their eye on the ‘one thing needful,’ denominations, creeds, ceremonies, the conclusions of philosophy, the disciplines of asceticism, are matters of comparative indifference. They represent merely the different angles from which the ‘soul may approach that simple union with Brahma which is its goal; and are useful only in so far as they contribute to this consummation. So thoroughgoing is Kabīr’s eclecticism, that he seems by turns Vedāntist and Vaishnavite, Pantheist and Transcendentalist, Brāhman and Sūfī. In the effort to tell the truth about that ineffable apprehension, so vast and yet so near, which controls his life, he seizes and twines together—as he might have woven together contrasting threads

¹ No. LXXX.

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upon his loom—symbols and ideas drawn from the most violent and conflicting philosophies and faiths. All are needed, if he is ever to suggest the character of that One whom the Upanishad called ‘the Sun-coloured Being who is beyond this Darkness’: as all the colours of the spectrum are needed if we would demonstrate the simple richness of white light. In thus adapting traditional materials to his own use he follows a method common amongst the mystics; who seldom exhibit any special love for originality of form. They will pour their wine into almost any vessel that comes to hand: generally using by preference—and lifting to new levels of beauty and significance—the religious or philosophic formulae current in their own day. Thus we find that some of Kabir’s finest poems have as their subjects the commonplaces

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of Hindu philosophy and religion: the Līlā, or Sport, of God, the Ocean of Bliss, the Bird of the Soul, Māyā, the Hundred-petalled Lotus, and the 'Formless Form.' Many, again, are soaked in Sūfī imagery and feeling. Others use as their material the ordinary surroundings and incidents of Indian life: the temple bells, the ceremony of the lamps, marriage, suttee, pilgrimage, the characters of the seasons; all felt by him in their mystical aspect, as sacraments of the soul's relation with Brahma. In many of these a particularly beautiful and intimate feeling for Nature is shown.¹

In the collection of songs here translated there will be found examples which illustrate nearly every aspect of Kabīr's thought, and all the fluctuations of the mystic's emotion: the ecstasy, the despair, the still beatitude,

¹ Nos. XV, XXIII, LXVII, LXXXVII, XCVIII.

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the eager self-devotion, the flashes of wide illumination, the moments of intimate love. His wide and deep vision of the universe, the 'Eternal Sport' of creation (LXXXII), the worlds being 'told like beads' within the Being of God (xiv, xvi, xvii, LXXVI), is here seen balanced by his lovely and delicate sense of intimate communion with the Divine Friend, Lover, Teacher of the soul (x, xi, xxiii, xxxv, li, LXXXV, LXXXVI, LXXXVIII, xcii, xciii; above all, the beautiful poem xxxiv). As these apparently paradoxical views of Reality are resolved in Brahma, so all other opposites are reconciled in Him: bondage and liberty, love and renunciation, pleasure and pain (xvii, xxv, xl, LXXXIX). Union with Him is the one thing that matters to the soul, its destiny and its need (li, lii, liv, LXX, LXXIV, xciii, xcvi); and this union, this

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discovery of God, is the simplest and most natural of all things, if we would but grasp it (xli, xlvi, lvi, lxxii, lxxvi, lxxviii, xcvi). The union, however, is brought about by love, not by knowledge or ceremonial observances (xxxviii, liv, lv, lix, xci); and the apprehension which that union confers is ineffable—‘neither This nor That,’ as Ruysbroeck has it (ix, xlvi, lxxvi). Real worship and communion is in Spirit and in Truth (xl, xli, lvi, lxiii, lxv, lxx), therefore idolatry is an insult to the Divine Lover (xlii, lxix) and the devices of professional sanctity are useless apart from charity and purity of soul (liv, lxv, lxvi). Since all things, and especially the heart of man, are God-inhabited, God-posessed (xxvi, lvi, lxxvi, lxxxix, xcvi), He may best be found in the here-and-now:

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in the normal, human, bodily existence, the 'mud' of material life (III, IV, VI, XXI, XXXIX, XL, XLIII, XLVIII, LXXII). 'We can reach the goal without crossing the road' (LXXVI)—not the cloister but the home is the proper theatre of man's efforts: and if he cannot find God there, he need not hope for success by going farther afield. 'In the home is reality.' There love and detachment, bondage and freedom, joy and pain play by turns upon the soul; and it is from their conflict that the Unstruck Music of the Infinite proceeds. 'Kabir says: None but Brahma can evoke its melodies.'

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III

This version of Kabir's songs is chiefly the work of Mr. Rabindranāth Tagore, the trend of whose mystical genius makes him—as all who read these poems will see—a peculiarly sympathetic interpreter of Kabir's vision and thought. It has been based upon the printed Hindī text with Bengali translation of Mr. Kshiti Mohan Sen; who has gathered from many sources—sometimes from books and manuscripts, sometimes from the lips of wandering ascetics and minstrels—a large collection of poems and hymns to which Kabir's name is attached, and carefully sifted the authentic songs from the many spurious works now attributed to him. These painstaking labours alone have made the present undertaking possible.

We have also had before us a

KABIR'S POEMS

manuscript English translation of 116 songs made by Mr. Ajit Kumār Chakravarty from Mr. Kshiti Mohan Sen's text, and a prose essay upon Kabir from the same hand. From these we have derived great assistance. A considerable number of readings from the translation have been adopted by us; whilst several of the facts mentioned in the essay have been incorporated into this Introduction. Our most grateful thanks are due to Mr. Ajit Kumār Chakravarty for the extremely generous and unselfish manner in which he has placed his work at our disposal.

E. U.

The reference of the headlines of the poems is to:

Sāntiniketana; Kabir by Sri Kshiti-mohan Sen, 4 parts, Brahmacharyāśrama, Bolpur, 1910-11.

For some assistance in normalizing the transliteration we are indebted to Prof. J. F. Blumhardt.

I

I. 13. *mo ko kahāṇ dhūṇro bande*

O SERVANT, where dost thou seek Me?
Lo! I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque:
I am neither in Kaaba nor in
Kailash:

Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,
nor in Yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at
once see Me: thou shalt meet Me
in a moment of time.

Kabir says, 'O Sadhu! God is the
breath of all breath.'

II

I. 16. *santan jāt na pūcho nirguṇiyān*

It is needless to ask of a saint the caste
to which he belongs;

KABIR'S POEMS

For the priest, the warrior, the trades-
man, and all the thirty-six castes,
alike are seeking for God.

It is but folly to ask what the caste
of a saint may be;

The barber has sought God, the
washerwoman, and the carpenter—

Even Raidas was a seeker after God.

The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by
caste.

Hindus and Moslems alike have
achieved that End, where remains
no mark of distinction.

III

I. 57. *sādho bhāī, jivat hī karo āsā*

O FRIEND! hope for Him whilst you
live, know whilst you live, under-
stand whilst you live: for in life
deliverance abides.

KABIR'S POEMS

If your bonds be not broken whilst
living, what hope of deliverance
in death?

It is but an empty dream, that the soul
shall have union with Him because
it has passed from the body:

If He is found now, He is found then,
If not, we do but go to dwell in the
City of Death.

If you have union now, you shall have
it hereafter.

Bathe in the truth, know the true
Guru, have faith in the true Name!

Kabir says: 'It is the Spirit of the
quest which helps; I am the slave
of this Spirit of the quest.'

IV

I. 58. *bāgo nā jā re nā jā*

Do not go to the garden of flowers!
O Friend! go not there;
In your body is the garden of flowers.

KABIR'S POEMS

Take your seat on the thousand petals
of the lotus, and there gaze on the
Infinite Beauty.

V

I. 63. *avadhū, māyā tajī na jāy*

TELL me, Brother, how can I renounce
Maya?

When I gave up the tying of ribbons,
still I tied my garment about me:

When I gave up tying my garment,
still I covered my body in its folds.

So, when I give up passion, I see that
anger remains;

And when I renounce anger, greed is
with me still;

And when greed is vanquished, pride
and vainglory remain;

When the mind is detached and casts
Maya away, still it clings to the
letter.

KABIR'S POEMS

Kabir says, 'Listen to me, dear Sadhu!
the true path is rarely found.'

VI

I. 83. *candā jhalkai yahi ghaṭ māhīn*

THE moon shines in my body, but my
blind eyes cannot see it:

The moon is within me, and so is the
sun.

The unstruck drum of Eternity is
sounded within me; but my deaf
ears cannot hear it.

So long as man clamours for the *I*
and the *Mine*, his works are as
naught:

When all love of the *I* and the *Mine*
is dead, then the work of the Lord
is done.

For work has no other aim than the
getting of knowledge:

When that comes, then work is put
away.

KABIR'S POEMS

The flower blooms for the fruit: when
the fruit comes, the flower withers.
The musk is in the deer, but it seeks
it not within itself: it wanders
in quest of grass.

VII

I. 85. *sādho, Brahm alakh lākhāyā*

WHEN He Himself reveals Himself,
Brahma brings into manifestation
That which can never be seen.

As the seed is in the plant, as the shade
is in the tree, as the void is in the
sky, as infinite forms are in the
void—

So from beyond the Infinite, the
Infinite comes; and from the
Infinite the finite extends.

The creature is in Brahma, and
Brahma is in the creature: they
are ever distinct, yet ever united.

KABIR'S POEMS

He Himself is the tree, the seed, and
the germ.

He Himself is the flower, the fruit,
and the shade.

He Himself is the sun, the light, and
the lighted.

He Himself is Brahma, creature, and
Maya.

He Himself is the manifold form, the
infinite space;

He is the breath, the word, and the
meaning.

He Himself is the limit and the limit-
less: and beyond both the limited
and the limitless is He, the Pure
Being.

He is the Immanent Mind in Brahma
and in the creature.

The Supreme Soul is seen within the
soul,

The Point is seen within the Supreme
Soul,

KABIR'S POEMS

And within the Point, the reflection
is seen again.

Kabir is blest because he has this
supreme vision !

VIII

I. 101. *is ghaṭ antar bāg bagīce*

WITHIN this earthen vessel are bowers
and groves, and within it is the
Creator :

Within this vessel are the seven oceans
and the unnumbered stars.

The touchstone and the jewel-
appraiser are within ;

And within this vessel the Eternal
soundeth, and the spring wells
up.

Kabir says : ' Listen to me, my friend !
My beloved Lord is within.'

KABIR'S POEMS

IX

I. 104. *aisā lo nahīṇ taisā lo*

O how may I ever express that secret word?

O how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?

If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:

If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.

He makes the inner and the outer worlds to be indivisibly one;

The conscious and the unconscious, both are His footstools.

He is neither manifest nor hidden,
He is neither revealed nor unrevealed:

There are no words to tell that which He is.

KABIR'S POEMS

X

I. 121. *tohi mori lagan lagāye*
re phakīr wā

To Thee Thou hast drawn my love,
O Fakir!

I was sleeping in my own chamber,
and Thou didst awaken me;
striking me with Thy voice, O
Fakir!

I was drowning in the deeps of the
ocean of this world, and Thou
didst save me: upholding me with
Thine arm, O Fakir!

Only one word and no second—and
Thou hast made me tear off all
my bonds, O Fakir!

Kabir says, 'Thou hast united Thy
heart to my heart, O Fakir!'

KABIR'S POEMS

XI

I. 131. *nis din khelat rahī*
sakhiyān sang

I PLAYED day and night with my
comrades, and now I am greatly
afraid.

So high is my Lord's palace, my heart
trembles to mount its stairs: yet
I must not be shy, if I would enjoy
His love.

My heart must cleave to my Lover; I
must withdraw my veil, and meet
Him with all my body:

Mine eyes must perform the ceremony
of the lamps of love.

Kabir says: 'Listen to me, friend:
he understands who loves. If you
feel not love's longing for your
Beloved One, it is vain to adorn
your body, vain to put unguent on
your eyelids.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XII

II. 24. *haṃsā, kaho purātan bāt*

TELL me, O Swan, your ancient tale.
From what land do you come, O
Swan? to what shore will you
fly?

Where would you take your rest, O
Swan, and what do you seek?

Even this morning, O Swan, awake,
arise, follow me!

There is a land where no doubt nor
sorrow have rule: where the terror
of Death is no more.

There the woods of spring are a-bloom,
and the fragrant scent 'He is I'
is borne on the wind:

There the bee of the heart is deeply
immersed, and desires no other
joy.

KABIR'S POEMS

XIII

II. 37. *anagadhiyā devā*

O LORD Increate, who will serve
Thee?

Every votary offers his worship to the
God of his own creation: each day
he receives service—

None seek Him, the Perfect: Brahma,
the Indivisible Lord.

They believe in ten Avatars; but no
Avatar can be the Infinite Spirit,
for he suffers the results of his
deeds:

The Supreme One must be other than
this.

The Yogi, the Sanyasi, the Ascetics,
are disputing one with another:

Kabir says, 'O brother! he who has
seen that radiance of love, he is
saved.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XIV

II. 56. *dariyā kī lahar dariyāo hai jī*

THE river and its waves are one surf:
where is the difference between the
river and its waves?

When the wave rises, it is the water;
and when it falls, it is the same
water again. Tell me, Sir, where
is the distinction?

Because it has been named as wave,
shall it no longer be considered as
water?

Within the Supreme Brahma, the
worlds are being told like beads:
Look upon that rosary with the eyes
of wisdom.

KABIR'S POEMS

XV

II. 57. *jāṇh khelat vasant riturāj*

WHERE Spring, the lord of the seasons,
 reigneth, there the Unstruck Music
 sounds of itself,
There the streams of light flow in all
 directions;
Few are the men who can cross to
 that shore!
There, where millions of Krishnas
 stand with hands folded,
Where millions of Vishnus bow their
 heads,
Where millions of Brahmās are reading
 the Vedas,
Where millions of Shivas are lost in
 contemplation,
Where millions of Indras dwell in the
 sky,
Where the demi-gods and the munis
 are unnumbered,

KABIR'S POEMS

Where millions of Saraswatis, Goddess
of Music, play on the vina—
There is my Lord self-revealed: and
the scent of sandal and flowers
dwells in those deeps.

XVI

II. 59. *jāṇh cet acet khambh dōu*

BETWEEN the poles of the conscious
and the unconscious, there has the
mind made a swing:

Thereon hang all beings and all worlds,
and that swing never ceases its
sway.

Millions of beings are there: the sun
and the moon in their courses are
there:

Millions of ages pass, and the swing
goes on.

All swing! the sky and the earth
and the air and the water; and
the Lord Himself taking form:

KABIR'S POEMS

And the sight of this has made Kabir
a servant.

XVII

II. 61. *grah candra tapan jot*
barat hai

THE light of the sun, the moon, and
the stars shines bright:

The melody of love swells forth, and
the rhythm of love's detachment
beats the time.

Day and night, the chorus of music
fills the heavens; and Kabir
says,

'My Beloved One gleams like the
lightning flash in the sky.'

Do you know how the moments per-
form their adoration?

Waving its row of lamps, the universe
sings in worship day and night,

There are the hidden banner and the
secret canopy:

KABIR'S POEMS

There the sound of the unseen bells is heard.

Kabir says: 'There adoration never ceases; there the Lord of the Universe sitteth on His throne.'

The whole world does its works and commits its errors: but few are the lovers who know the Beloved.

The devout seeker is he who mingles in his heart the double currents of love and detachment, like the mingling of the streams of Ganges and Jumna;

In his heart the sacred water flows day and night; and thus the round of births and deaths is brought to an end.

Behold what wonderful rest is in the Supreme Spirit! and he enjoys it, who makes himself meet for it.

Held by the cords of love, the swing of

KABIR'S POEMS

the Ocean of Joy sways to and fro;
and a mighty sound breaks forth
in song.

See what a lotus blooms there without
water! and Kabir says,
' My heart's bee drinks its nectar.'

What a wonderful lotus it is, that
blooms at the heart of the spinning
wheel of the universe! Only a few
pure souls know of its true delight.
Music is all around it, and there the
heart partakes of the joy of the
Infinite Sea.

Kabir says: 'Dive thou into that
Ocean of sweetness: thus let all
errors of life and of death flee
away.'

Behold how the thirst of the five
senses is quenched there! and the
three forms of misery are no more!
Kabir says: 'It is the sport of the

KABIR'S POEMS

Unattainable One: look within,
and behold how the moonbeams
of that Hidden One shine in you.'

There falls the rhythmic beat of life
and death:

Rapture wells forth, and all space is
radiant with light.

There the Unstruck Music is sounded;
it is the music of the love of the
three worlds.

There millions of lamps of sun and of
moon are burning;

There the drum beats, and the lover
swings in play.

There love-songs resound, and light
rains in showers; and the wor-
shipper is entranced in the taste
of the heavenly nectar.

Look upon life and death; there is no
separation between them,

The right hand and the left hand are
one and the same.

KABIR'S POEMS

Kabir says: 'There the wise man is speechless; for this truth may never be found in Vedas or in books.'

I have had my Seat on the Self-poised
One,

I have drunk of the Cup of the In-
effable,

I have found the Key of the Mystery,
I have reached the Root of Union.

Travelling by no track, I have come
to the Sorrowless Land: very
easily has the mercy of the great
Lord come upon me.

They have sung of Him as infinite and
unattainable: but I in my medita-
tions have seen Him without sight.

That is indeed the sorrowless land, and
none know the path that leads
there:

Only he who is on that path has surely
transcended all sorrow.

KABIR'S POEMS

Wonderful is that land of rest, to which
no merit can win;

It is the wise who has seen it, it is
the wise who has sung of it.

This is the Ultimate Word: but can
any express its marvellous savour?
He who has savoured it once, he
knows what joy it can give.

Kabir says: 'Knowing it, the ignor-
ant man becomes wise, and the
wise man becomes speechless and
silent,

The worshipper is utterly inebriated,
His wisdom and his detachment are
made perfect;

He drinks from the cup of the in-
breathings and the outbreathings
of love.'

There the whole sky is filled with
sound, and there that music is
made without fingers and without
strings;

KABIR'S POEMS

There the game of pleasure and pain
does not cease.

Kabir says: 'If you merge your life
in the Ocean of Life, you will
find your life in the Supreme
Land of Bliss.'

What a frenzy of ecstasy there is in
every hour! and the worshipper
is pressing out and drinking the
essence of the hours: he lives in
the life of Brahma.

I speak truth, for I have accepted
truth in life; I am now attached
to truth, I have swept all tinsel
away.

Kabir says: 'Thus is the worshipper
set free from fear; thus have all
errors of life and of death left him.'

There the sky is filled with music:

There it rains nectar:

There the harp-strings jingle, and
there the drums beat.

KABIR'S POEMS

What a secret splendour is there, in
the mansion of the sky!

There no mention is made of the rising
and the setting of the sun;

In the ocean of manifestation, which
is the light of love, day and night
are felt to be one.

Joy for ever, no sorrow, no struggle!

There have I seen joy filled to the
brim, perfection of joy;

No place for error is there.

Kabir says: 'There have I witnessed
the sport of One Bliss!'

I have known in my body the sport
of the universe: I have escaped
from the error of this world.

The inward and the outward are
become as one sky, the Infinite
and the finite are united: I am
drunken with the sight of this
All!

This light of Thine fulfils the uni-

KABIR'S POEMS

verse: the lamp of love that burns
on the salver of knowledge.

Kabir says: 'There error cannot
enter, and the conflict of life and
death is felt no more.'

XVIII

II. 77. *maddh ākāś āp jahān baithe*

THE middle region of the sky, wherein
the spirit dwelleth, is radiant with
the music of light;

There, where the pure and white
music blossoms, my Lord takes
His delight.

In the wondrous effulgence of each
hair of His body, the brightness
of millions of suns and of moons
is lost.

On that shore there is a city, where
the rain of nectar pours and pours,
and never ceases.

KABIR'S POEMS

Kabir says: 'Come, O Dharmadas!
and see my great Lord's Durbar.'

XIX

II. 20. *paramātam guru nikaṭ virājaiṇ*

O my heart! the Supreme Spirit, the
great Master, is near you: wake,
oh wake!

Run to the feet of your Beloved: for
your Lord stands near to your
head.

You have slept for unnumbered ages;
this morning will you not wake?

XX

II. 22. *man tu pār utar kāṇh jaiho*

To what shore would you cross, O
my heart? there is no traveller
before you, there is no road:

KABIR'S POEMS

Where is the movement, where is the
rest, on that shore?

There is no water; no boat, no boat-
man, is there;

There is not so much as a rope
, to tow the boat, nor a man to
draw it.

No earth, no sky, no time, no thing,
is there: no shore, no ford!

There, there is neither body nor mind:
and where is the place that shall
still the thirst of the soul? You
shall find naught in that empti-
ness.

Be strong, and enter into your own
body: for there your foothold is
firm. Consider it well, O my heart!
go not elsewhere.

Kabir says: 'Put all imaginations
away, and stand fast in that which
you are.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XXI

II. 33. *ghar ghar dīpak barai*

LAMPS burn in every house, O blind one! and you cannot see them.

One day your eyes shall suddenly be opened, and you shall see: and the fetters of death will fall from you.

There is nothing to say or to hear, there is nothing to do: it is he who is living, yet dead, who shall never die again.

Because he lives in solitude, therefore the Yogi says that his home is far away.

Your Lord is near: yet you are climbing the palm-tree to seek Him.

The Brahman priest goes from house to house and initiates people into faith:

KABIR'S POEMS

Alas! the true fountain of life is
beside you, and you have set up a
stone to worship.

Kabir says: 'I may never express
how sweet my Lord is. Yoga and
the telling of beads, virtue and
vice—these are naught to Him.'

XXII

II. 38. *sādho, so satgur mohi bhāwai*

O BROTHER, my heart yearns for that
true Guru, who fills the cup of
true love, and drinks of it himself,
and offers it then to me.

He removes the veil from the eyes, and
gives the true Vision of Brahma:

He reveals the worlds in Him, and
makes me to hear the Unstruck
Music:

He shows joy and sorrow to be one:
He fills all utterance with love.

KABIR'S POEMS

Kabir says: ' Verily he has no fear,
who has such a Guru to lead him
to the shelter of safety!'

XXIII

II. 40. *tiṇwir sāñjh kā gahirā āwai*

THE shadows of evening fall thick
and deep, and the darkness of love
envelops the body and the mind.

Open the window to the west, and be
lost in the sky of love;

Drink the sweet honey that steeps the
petals of the lotus of the heart.

Receive the waves in your body: what
splendour is in the region of the
sea!

Hark! the sounds of conches and bells
are rising.

Kabir says: ' O brother, behold! the
Lord is in this vessel of my
body.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XXIV

II. 48. *jis se rahani apār jagat men*

MORE than all else do I cherish at
heart that love which makes me
to live a limitless life in this
world.

It is like the lotus, which lives in the
water and blooms in the water:
yet the water cannot touch its
petals, they open beyond its
reach.

It is like a wife, who enters the fire
at the bidding of love. She burns
and lets others grieve, yet never
dishonours love.

This ocean of the world is hard to
cross: its waters are very deep.
Kabir says: 'Listen to me, O
Sadhu! few there are who have
reached its end.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XXV

II. 45. *Hari ne apnā āp chipāyā*

My Lord hides Himself, and my Lord
wonderfully reveals Himself:

My Lord has encompassed me with
hardness, and my Lord has cast
down my limitations.

My Lord brings to me words of sorrow
and words of joy, and He Himself
heals their strife.

I will offer my body and mind to my
Lord: I will give up my life, but
never can I forget my Lord!

XXVI

II. 75. *ōṅkar siwāe kōi sirjai*

ALL things are created by the Om;
The love-form is His body.

KABIR'S POEMS

He is without form, without quality,
without decay:

Seek thou union with Him!

But that formless God takes a
thousand forms in the eyes of His
creatures:

He is pure and indestructible,
His form is infinite and fathomless,
He dances in rapture, and waves of
form arise from His dance.

The body and the mind cannot contain
themselves, when they are touched
by His great joy.

He is immersed in all consciousness,
all joys, and all sorrows;

He has no beginning and no end;

He holds all within His bliss.

KABIR'S POEMS

XXVII

II. 81. *satgur sōi dayā kar dīnhā*

It is the mercy of my true Guru that
has made me to know the un-
known;

I have learned from Him how to walk
without feet, to see without eyes,
to hear without ears, to drink with-
out mouth, to fly without wings;

I have brought my love and my
meditation into the land where
there is no sun and moon, nor day
and night.

Without eating, I have tasted of the
sweetness of nectar; and without
water, I have quenched my thirst.

Where there is the response of delight,
there is the fullness of joy. Before
whom can that joy be uttered?

Kabir says: 'The Guru is great
beyond words, and great is the
good fortune of the disciple.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XXVIII

II. 85. *nirgun āge sargun nācai*

BEFORE the Unconditioned, the Conditioned dances:

‘Thou and I are one!’ this trumpet proclaims.

The Guru comes, and bows down before the disciple:

This is the greatest of wonders.

XXIX

II. 87. *Kabir kab se bhaye vairāgi*

GORAKHNATH asks Kabir:

‘Tell me, O Kabir, when did your vocation begin? Where did your love have its rise?’

Kabir answers:

‘When He whose forms are manifold had not begun His play: when

KABIR'S POEMS

there was no Guru, and no disciple:
when the world was not spread
out: when the Supreme One was
alone—

Then I became an ascetic; then, O
Gorakh, my love was drawn to
Brahma.

Brahma, did not hold the crown on
his head; the god Vishnu was not
anointed as king; the power of
Shiva was still unborn; when I
was instructed in Yoga.

‘ I became suddenly revealed in
Benares, and Ramananda illumined
me;

I brought with me the thirst for the
Infinite, and I have come for the
meeting with Him.

In simplicity will I unite with the
Simple One; my love will surge up.
O Gorakh, march thou with His
music!’

KABIR'S POEMS

XXX

II. 95. *yā tarvar men ek pakherū*

ON this tree is a bird: it dances in the
joy of life.

None knows where it is: and who
knows what the burden of its
music may be?

Where the branches throw a deep
shade, there does it have its nest:
and it comes in the evening and
flies away in the morning, and says
not a word of that which it means.

None tell me of this bird that sings
within me.

It is neither coloured nor colourless:
it has neither form nor outline:

It sits in the shadow of love.

It dwells within the Unattainable, the
Infinite, and the Eternal; and no
one marks when it comes and goes.

Kabir says: 'O brother Sadhu!

KABIR'S POEMS

deep is the mystery. Let wise men
seek to know where rests that
bird.'

XXXI

II. 100. *ni's din sālai ghāw*

A SORE pain troubles me day and
night, and I cannot sleep;
I long for the meeting with my
Beloved, and my father's house
gives me pleasure no more.

The gates of the sky are opened, the
temple is revealed:
I meet my husband, and leave at His
feet the offering of my body and
my mind.

XXXII

II. 103. *nāco re mero man, matta hoy*
DANCE, my heart! dance to-day with
joy.

KABIR'S POEMS

The strains of love fill the days and
the nights with music, and the
world is listening to its melodies:
Mad with joy, life and death dance
to the rhythm of this music. The
hills and the sea and the earth
dance. The world of man dances
in laughter and tears.

Why put on the robe of the monk, and
live aloof from the world in lonely
pride?

Behold! my heart dances in the de-
light of a hundred arts; and the
Creator is well pleased.

XXXIII

II. 105. *man mast huā tab kyon bole*

WHERE is the need of words, when
love has made drunken the
heart?

I have wrapped the diamond in my

KABIR'S POEMS

cloak; why open it again and again?

When its load was light, the pan of the balance went up: now it is full, where is the need for weighing?

The swan has taken its flight to the lake beyond the mountains; why should it search for the pools and ditches any more?

Your Lord dwells within you: why need your outward eyes be opened?

Kabir says: 'Listen, my brother! my Lord, who ravishes my eyes, has united Himself with me.'

XXXIV

II. 110. *mohi tohi lāgī kaise chuṭe*

How could the love between Thee and me sever?

As the leaf of the lotus abides on the

KABIR'S POEMS

water: so thou art my Lord, and
I am Thy servant.

As the night-bird Chakor gazes all
night at the moon: so Thou art
my Lord and I am Thy servant.

From the beginning until the ending
of time, there is love between
Thee and me; and how shall such
love be extinguished?

Kabir says: 'As the river enters
into the ocean, so my heart touches
Thee.'

XXXV

II. 113. *vālam, āwo hamāre geh re*

My body and my mind are grieved for
the want of Thee;

O my Beloved! come to my house.

When people say I am Thy bride, I
am ashamed; for I have not
touched Thy heart with my heart.

Then what is this love of mine? I

KABIR'S POEMS

have no taste for food, I have no sleep; my heart is ever restless within doors and without.

As water is to the thirsty, so is the lover to the bride. Who is there that will carry my news to my Beloved?

Kabir is restless: he is dying for sight of Him.

XXXVI

II. 126. *jāg piyārī, ab kān sowai*

O FRIEND, awake, and sleep no more!

The night is over and gone, would you lose your day also?

Others, who have wakened, have received jewels;

O foolish woman! you have lost all whilst you slept.

Your lover is wise, and you are foolish,
O woman!

KABIR'S POEMS

You never prepared the bed of your
husband:

O mad one! you passed your time in
silly play.

Your youth was passed in vain, for
you did not know your Lord;

Wake, wake! See! your bed is
empty: He left you in the
night.

Kabir says: 'Only she wakes, whose
heart is pierced with the arrow
of His music.'

XXXVII

I. 36. *sūr parkāś, tāṇh rain kahān pāiye*

WHERE is the night, when the sun is
shining? If it is night, then the
sun withdraws its light.

Where knowledge is, can ignorance
endure? If there be ignorance,
then knowledge must die.

KABIR'S POEMS

If there be lust, how can love be there?
Where there is love, there is no
lust.

Lay hold on your sword, and join in
the fight. Fight, O my brother,
as long as life lasts.

Strike off your enemy's head, and there
make an end of him quickly: then
come, and bow your head at your
King's Durbar.

He who is brave, never forsakes the
battle: he who flies from it is no
true fighter.

In the field of this body a great
war goes forward, against passion,
anger, pride, and greed:

It is in the kingdom of truth, content-
ment and purity, that this battle
is raging; and the sword that
rings forth most loudly is the
sword of His Name.

Kabir says: 'When a brave knight

KABIR'S POEMS

takes the field, a host of cowards
is put to flight.

It is a hard fight and a weary one, this
fight of the truth-seeker: for the
vow of the truth-seeker is more
hard than that of the warrior, or
of the widowed wife who would
follow her husband.

For the warrior fights for a few hours,
and the widow's struggle with death
is soon ended:

But the truth-seeker's battle goes on
day and night, as long as life lasts
it never ceases.'

XXXVIII

I. 50. *bhram kā tālā lagā mahal re*

THE lock of error shuts the gate, open
it with the key of love:

Thus, by opening the door, thou shalt
wake the Beloved.

KABIR'S POEMS

Kabir says: 'O brother! do not pass
by such good fortune as this.'

XXXIX

I. 59. *sādhō, yah tan ṭhāṭh taṇvure kā*

O FRIEND! this body is His lyre;
He tightens its strings, and draws
from it the melody of Brahma.

If the strings snap and the keys
slacken, then to dust must this
instrument of dust return:

Kabir says: 'None but Brahma can
evoke its melodies.'

XL

I. 65. *avadhū bhūle ko ghar lāwe*

HE is dear to me indeed who can call
back the wanderer to his home.
In the home is the true union, in

KABIR'S POEMS

the home is enjoyment of life:
why should I forsake my home and
wander in the forest? If Brahma
helps me to realize truth, verily
I will find both bondage and de-
liverance in the home.

He is dear to me indeed who has
power to dive deep into Brahma;
whose mind loses itself with ease
in His contemplation.

He is dear to me who knows Brahma,
and can dwell on His supreme
truth in meditation; and who can
play the melody of the Infinite
by uniting love and renunciation
in life.

Kabir says: 'The home is the abiding
place; in the home is reality; the
home helps to attain Him Who
is real. So stay where you are,
and all things shall come to you in
time.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XLI

I. 76. *santo, sahaj samādh bhalī*

O SADHU! the simple union is the best.

Since the day when I met with my Lord, there has been no end to the sport of our love.

I shut not my eyes, I close not my ears, I do not mortify my body;

I see with eyes open and smile, and behold His beauty everywhere:

I utter His Name, and whatever I see, it reminds me of Him; whatever I do, it becomes His worship.

The rising and the setting are one to me; all contradictions are solved.

Wherever I go, I move round Him, All I achieve is His service:

When I lie down, I lie prostrate at His feet.

KABIR'S POEMS

He is the only adorable one to me: I
have none other.

My tongue has left off impure words,
it sings His glory day and night: .

Whether I rise or sit down, I can
never forget Him; for the rhythm
of His music beats in my ears.

Kabir says: 'My heart is frenzied,
and I disclose in my soul what is
hidden. I am immersed in 'that
one great bliss which transcends
all pleasure and pain.'

XLII

I. 79. *tīrath meṇ to sab pānī hai*

THERE is nothing but water at the
holy bathing places; and I know
that they are useless, for I have
bathed in them.

The images are all lifeless, they cannot
speak; I know, for I have cried
aloud to them.

KABIR'S POEMS

The Purana and the Koran are mere words; lifting up the curtain, I have seen.

Kabir gives utterance to the words of experience; and he knows very well that all other things are untrue.

XLIII

I. 82. *pānī vic mīn piyāsī*

I LAUGH when I hear that the fish in the water is thirsty:

You do not see that the Real is in your home, and you wander from forest to forest listlessly!

Here is the truth! Go where you will, to Benares or to Mathura; if you do not find your soul, the world is unreal to you.

KABIR'S POEMS

XLIV

I. 93. *gagan maṭh gaib nisān gadē*

THE Hidden Banner is planted in the temple of the sky; there the blue canopy decked with the moon and set with bright jewels is spread.

There the light of the sun and the moon is shining: still your mind to silence before that splendour.

Kabir says: 'He who has drunk of this nectar, wanders like one who is mad.'

XLV

I. 97. *sādho, ko hai kāñh se āyo*

WHO are you, and whence do you come?

Where dwells that Supreme Spirit, and how does He have His sport with all created things?

KABIR'S POEMS

The fire is in the wood; but who awakens it suddenly? Then it turns to ashes, and where goes the force of the fire?

The true guru teaches that He has neither limit nor infinitude.

Kabir says: 'Brahma suits His language to the understanding of His hearer.'

XLVI

I. 98. *sādhō, sahajai kāyā śodho*

O SADHU! purify your body in the simple way.

As the seed is within the banyan tree, and within the seed are the flowers, the fruits, and the shade:

So the germ is within the body, and within that germ is the body again.

The fire, the air, the water, the earth, and the aether; you cannot have these outside of Him.

KABIR'S POEMS

O Kazi, O Pundit, consider it well:
what is there that is not in the
soul?

The water-filled pitcher is placed upon
water, it has water within and
without.

It should not be given a name, lest it
call forth the error of dualism.

Kabir says: 'Listen to the Word,
the Truth, which is your essence.
He speaks the Word to Himself;
and He Himself is the Creator.'

XLVII

I. 102. *tarvar ek mūl bin ṭhāḍā*

THERE is a strange tree, which stands
without roots and bears fruits
without blossoming;

It has no branches and no leaves, it
is lotus all over.

Two birds sing there; one is the Guru,
and the other the disciple:

KABIR'S POEMS

The disciple chooses the manifold
fruits of life and tastes them, and
the Guru beholds him in joy.

What Kabir says is hard to under-
stand: 'The bird is beyond seek-
ing, yet it is most clearly visible.
The Formless is in the midst of all
forms. I sing the glory of forms.'

XLVIII

I. 107. *calat mansā acal kīnhī*

I HAVE stilled my restless mind, and
my heart is radiant: for in That-
ness I have seen beyond That-
ness, in company I have seen the
Comrade Himself.

Living in bondage, I have set myself
free: I have broken away from the
clutch of all narrowness.

Kabir says: 'I have attained the
unattainable, and my heart is
coloured with the colour of love.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XLIX

I. 105. *jo dīśai, so to hai nāhīn*

THAT which you see is not: and for
that which is, you have no words.

Unless you see, you believe not: what
is told you you cannot accept.

He who is discerning knows by the
word; and the ignorant stands
gaping.

Some contemplate the Formless, and
others meditate on form: but the
wise man knows that Brahma is
beyond both.

That beauty of His is not seen of
the eye: that metre of His is not
heard of the ear.

Kabir says: 'He who has found
both love and renunciation never
descends to death.'

KABIR'S POEMS

I. 126. *muralī bajat akhaṇḍ sadāye*

THE flute of the Infinite is played
without ceasing, and its sound is
love:

When love renounces all limits, it
reaches truth.

How widely the fragrance spreads!
It has no end, nothing stands in
its way.

The form of this melody is bright
like a million suns: incomparably
sounds the vina, the vina of the
notes of truth.

LI

I. 129. *sakhiyo, ham hūṇ bhāī*
vālamāśī

DEAR friend, I am eager to meet my
Beloved! My youth has flowered,

KABIR'S POEMS

and the pain of separation from
Him troubles my breast.

I am wandering yet in the alleys of
knowledge without purpose, but I
have received His news in these
alleys of knowledge.

I have a letter from my Beloved: in
this letter is an unutterable mes-
sage, and now my fear of death is
done away.

Kabir says: 'O my loving friend!
I have got for my gift the Death-
less One.'

LII

I. 130. *sāṁ bin dard kareje hoy*

WHEN I am parted from my Beloved,
my heart is full of misery: I have
no comfort in the day, I have no
sleep in the night. To whom shall
I tell my sorrow?

KABIR'S POEMS

The night is dark; the hours slip by.
Because my Lord is absent, I
start up and tremble with fear.
Kabir says: 'Listen, my friend! there
is no other satisfaction, save in the
encounter with the Beloved.'

LIII

I. 122. *kaun muralī śabd śun*
ānand bhayo

WHAT is that flute whose music thrills
me with joy?
The flame burns without a lamp;
The lotus blossoms without a root;
Flowers bloom in clusters;
The moon-bird is devoted to the moon;
With all its heart the rain-bird longs
for the shower of rain;
But upon whose love does the Lover
concentrate His entire life?

KABIR'S POEMS

LIV

I. 112. *śuntā nahī dhun kī khabar*

HAVE you not heard the tune which
the Unstruck Music is playing?
In the midst of the chamber the
harp of joy is gently and sweetly
played; and where is the need of
going without to hear it?

If you have not drunk of the nectar
of that One Love, what boots it
though you should purge yourself
of all stains?

The Kazi is searching the words of the
Koran, and instructing others: but
if his heart be not steeped in that
love, what does it avail, though
he be a teacher of men?

The Yogi dyes his garments with
red: but if he knows naught of
that colour of love, what does it
avail though his garments be
tinted?

KABIR'S POEMS

Kabir says: 'Whether I be in the temple or the balcony, in the camp or in the flower garden, I tell you truly that every moment my Lord is taking His delight in me.'

LV

I. 73. *bhakti kā mārāg jhīnā re*

SUBTLE is the path of love!

Therein there is no asking and no not-asking,

There one loses one's self at His feet,

There one is immersed in the joy of the seeking: plunged in the deeps of love as the fish in the water.

The lover is never slow in offering his head for his Lord's service.

Kabir declares the secret of this love.

KABIR'S POEMS

LVI

I. 68. *bhāī kōī satguru sant kahāwai*

HE is the real Sadhu, who can reveal
the form of the Formless to the
vision of these eyes:

Who teaches the simple way of attain-
ing Him, that is other than 'rites
or ceremonies:

Who does not make you close the doors,
and hold the breath, and renounce
the world:

Who makes you perceive the Supreme
Spirit wherever the mind attaches
itself:

Who teaches you to be still in the
midst of all your activities.

Ever immersed in bliss, having no
fear in his mind, he keeps the spirit
of union in the midst of all enjoy-
ments.

KABIR'S POEMS

The infinite dwelling of the Infinite
Being is everywhere: in earth,
water, sky, and air:

Firm as the thunderbolt, the seat of
the seeker is established above
the void.

He who is within is without: I see
Him and none else.

LVII

I. 66. *sādho, sabd sādhanā kījai*

RECEIVE that Word from which the
Universe springeth!

That Word is the Guru; I have heard
it, and become the disciple.

How many are there who know the
meaning of that Word?

O Sadhu! practise that Word!

The Vedas and the Puranas proclaim
it,

The world is established in it,

KABIR'S POEMS

The Rishis and devotees speak of it:
But none knows the mystery of the
Word.

The householder leaves his house when
he hears it,

The ascetic comes back to love when
he hears it,

The Six Philosophies expound it,

The Spirit of Renunciation points to
that Word,

From that Word the world-form has
sprung,

That Word reveals all.

Kabir says: 'But who knows whence
the Word cometh?'

LVIII

I. 63. *pī le pyālā, ho matwālā*

EMPTY the Cup! O be drunken!

Drink the divine nectar of His Name!

Kabir says: 'Listen to me, dear
Sadhu!

KABIR'S POEMS

From the sole of the foot to the crown
of the head this mind is filled with
poison.'

LIX

I. 52. *khasm na cīnhai bāwarī*

O MAN, if thou dost not know thine
own ' Lord, whereof art thou so
proud?

Put thy cleverness away: mere words
shall never unite thee to Him.

Do not deceive thyself with the wit-
ness of the Scriptures:

Love is something other than this,
and he who has sought it truly has
found it.

LX

I. 56. *sukh sindh kī sair kā*

THE savour of wandering in the ocean
of deathless life has rid me of all
my asking:

KABIR'S POEMS

As the tree is in the seed, so all diseases are in this asking.

LXI

I. 48. *sukh sāgar men āike*

WHEN at last you are come to the ocean of happiness, do not go back thirsty.

Wake, foolish man! for Death stalks you. Here is pure water before you; drink it at every breath.

Do not follow the mirage on foot, but thirst for the nectar;

Dhruva, Prahlad, and Shukadeva have drunk of it, and also Raidas has tasted it:

The saints are drunk with love, their thirst is for love.

Kabir says: 'Listen to me, brother! The nest of fear is broken.

Not for a moment have you come face to face with the world:

KABIR'S POEMS

You are weaving your bondage of
falsehood, your words are full of
deception:

With the load of desires which you
hold on your head, how can you
be light?’

Kabir says: ‘Keep within you truth,
detachment, and love.’

LXII

I. 35. *satī ko kaun śikhāwtā hai*

Who has ever taught the widowed
wife to burn herself on the pyre of
her dead husband?

And who has ever taught love to find
bliss in renunciation?

LXIII

I. 39. *are man, dhīraj kāhe na dharai*

Why so impatient, my heart?

He who watches over birds, beasts, and
insects,

KABIR'S POEMS

He who cared for you whilst you were
yet in your mother's womb,
Shall He not care for you now that
you are come forth?

O my heart, how could you turn from
the smile of your Lord and wander
so far from Him?

You have left your Beloved and are
thinking of others: and this is
why all your work is in vain.

LXIV

I. 117. *sāiṇ se lagan kaṭhin hai, bhāi*

How hard it is to meet my Lord!
The rain-bird wails in thirst for the
rain: almost she dies of her long-
ing, yet she would have none other
water than the rain.

Drawn by the love of music, the deer
moves forward: she dies as she
listens to the music, yet she shrinks
not in fear.

KABIR'S POEMS

The widowed wife sits by the body
of her dead husband: she is not
afraid of the fire.
Put away all fear for this poor body.

LXV

I. 22. *jab main bhulā, re bhāī*

O BROTHER! when I was forgetful,
my true Guru showed me the
Way.

Then I left off all rites and ceremonies,
I bathed no more in the holy water:
Then I learned that it was I alone who
was mad, and the whole world
beside me was sane; and I had
disturbed these wise people.

From that time forth I knew no more
how to roll in the dust in obeisance:
I do not ring the temple bell:
I do not set the idol on its throne:
I do not worship the image with
flowers.

KABIR'S POEMS

It is not the austerities that mortify
the flesh which are pleasing to
the Lord,

When you leave off your clothes and
kill your senses, you do not please
the Lord:

The man who is kind and who practises
righteousness, who remains passive
amidst the affairs of the world,
who considers all creatures on éarth
as his own self,

He attains the Immortal Being, the
true God is ever with him.

Kabir says: 'He attains the true
Name whose words are pure, and
who is free from pride and conceit.'

LXVI

I. 20. *man na raṅgāye*

THE Yogi dyes his garments, instead
of dyeing his mind in the colours
of love:

KABIR'S POEMS

He sits within the temple of the Lord,
leaving Brahma to worship a
stone.

He pierces holes in his ears, he has a
great beard and matted locks, he
looks like a goat:

He goes forth into the wilderness,
killing all his desires, and turns
himself into an eunuch:

He shaves his head and dyes his
garments; he reads the Gita and
becomes a mighty talker.

Kabir says: ' You are going to the doors
of death, bound hand and foot!'

LXVII

I. 9. *nā jāne sāhab kaisā hai*

I DO not know what manner of God is
mine.

The Mullah cries aloud to Him: and
why? Is your Lord deaf? The
subtle anklets that ring on the

KABIR'S POEMS

feet of an insect when it moves
are heard of Him.

Tell your beads, paint your forehead
with the mark of your God, and
wear matted locks long and showy:
but a deadly weapon is in your heart,
and how shall you have God?

LXVIII

III. 102. *ham se rahā na jāy*

I HEAR the melody of His flute, and
I cannot contain myself:

The flower blooms, though it is not
spring; and already the bee has
received its invitation.

The sky roars and the lightning flashes,
the waves arise in my heart,

The rain falls; and my heart longs for
my Lord.

Where the rhythm of the world rises
and falls, thither my heart has
reached:

KABIR'S POEMS

There the hidden banners are flutter-
ing in the air.

Kabir says: ' My heart is dying, though
it lives.'

LXIX

III. 2. *jo khodā masjid vasat hai*

IF God be within the mosque, then to
whom does this world belong?

If Ram be within the image which you
find upon your pilgrimage, then
who is there to know what happens
without?

Hari is in the East: Allah is in the
West. Look within your heart,
for there you will find both Karim
and Ram;

All the men and women of the world
are His living forms.

Kabir is the child of Allah and of
Ram: He is my Guru, He is my
Pir.

KABIR'S POEMS

LXX

III. 9. *śīl santosh sadā samadṛishṭi*

HE who is meek and contented, he
who has an equal vision, whose
mind is filled with the fullness of
acceptance and of rest;

He who has seen Him and touched
Him, he is freed from all fear and
trouble.

To him the perpetual thought of God
is like sandal paste smeared on
the body, to him nothing else is
delight:

His work and his rest are filled with
music: he sheds abroad the radi-
ance of love.

Kabir says: 'Touch His feet, who is
one and indivisible, immutable and
peaceful; who fills all vessels to
the brim with joy, and whose form
is love.'

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXI

III. 13. *sādh saṅgat pītam*

Go thou to the company of the good,
where the Beloved One has His
dwelling place:

Take all thy thoughts and love and
instruction from thence.

Let that assembly be burnt to ashes
where His Name is not spoken!

Tell me, how couldst thou hold a
wedding-feast, if the bridegroom
himself were not there?

Waver no more, think only of the
Beloved;

Set not thy heart on the worship of
other gods, there is no worth in
the worship of other masters.

Kabir deliberates and says: 'Thus
thou shalt never find the Be-
loved!'

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXII

III. 26. *tor hīrā hīrāilwā*
kīcad men

THE jewel is lost in the mud, and all
are seeking for it;
Some look for it in the east, and some
in the west; some in the water
and some amongst stones.
But the servant Kabir has appraised
it at its true value, and has
wrapped it with care in the end
of the mantle of his heart.

LXXIII

III. 26. *āyau dīn gaune kā ho*

THE palanquin came to take me away
to my husband's home, and it sent
through my heart a thrill of joy;
But the bearers have brought me into
the lonely forest, where I have no
one of my own.

KABIR'S POEMS

O bearers, I entreat you by your feet,
wait but a moment longer: let
me go back to my kinsmen and
friends, and take my leave of them.
The servant Kabir sings: 'O Sadhu!
finish your buying and selling,
have done with your good and
your bad: for there are no markets
and no shops in the land to which
you go.'

LXXIV

III. 30. *are dil, prem nagar*
kā ant na pāyā

O my heart! you have not known
all the secrets of this city of love:
in ignorance you came, and in
ignorance you return.
O my friend, what have you done with
this life? You have taken on your
head the burden heavy with stones,
and who is to lighten it for you?

KABIR'S POEMS

Your Friend stands on the other
shore, but you never think in your
mind how you may meet with Him:
The boat is broken, and yet you sit ever
upon the bank; and thus you are
beaten to no purpose by the waves.
The servant Kabir asks you to con-
sider; who is there that shall be-
friend you at the last?
You are alone, you have no companion:
you will suffer the consequences of
your own deeds.

LXXV

III. 55. *ved kahe sargun ke āge*

THE Vedas say that the Unconditioned
stands beyond the world of Con-
ditions.
O woman, what does it avail thee to
dispute whether He is beyond all
or in all?

KABIR'S POEMS

See thou everything as thine own dwelling-place: the mist of pleasure and pain can never spread there.

There Brahma is revealed day and night: there light is His garment, light is His seat, light rests on thy head.

Kabir says: 'The Master, who is true, He is all light.'

LXXVI

III. 48. *tū surat nain nihār*

OPEN your eyes of love, and see Him who pervades this world! consider it well, and know that this is your own country.

When you meet the true Guru, He will awaken your heart;

He will tell you the secret of love and detachment, and then you will know indeed that He transcends this universe.

KABIR'S POEMS

This world is the City of Truth, its
 maze of paths enchants the heart:
We can reach the goal without crossing
 the road, such is the sport unending.
Where the ring of manifold joys ever
 dances about Him, there is the
 sport of Eternal Bliss.
When we know this, then all our
 receiving and renouncing is over;
Thenceforth the heat of having shall
 never scorch us more.

He is the Ultimate Rest unbounded:
He has spread His form of love
 throughout all the world.
From that Ray which is Truth, streams
 of new forms are perpetually
 springing: and He pervades those
 forms.
All the gardens and groves and bowers
 are abounding with blossom; and
 the air breaks forth into ripples
 of joy.

KABIR'S POEMS

There the swan plays a wonderful
game,

There the Unstruck Music eddies
around the Infinite One;

There in the midst the Throne of the
Unheld is shining, whereon the
great Being sits—

Millions of suns are shamed by the
radiance of a single hair of His body.

On the harp of the road what true
melodies are being sounded! and
its notes pierce the heart:

There the Eternal Fountain is playing
its endless life-streams of birth and
death.

They call Him Emptiness who is the
Truth of truths, in Whom all
truths are stored!

There within Him creation goes for-
ward, which is beyond all philo-
sophy; for philosophy cannot
attain to Him:

KABIR'S POEMS

There is an endless world, O my
Brother! and there is the Name-
less Being, of whom naught can
be said.

Only he knows it who has reached
that region: it is other than all
that is heard and said.

No form, no body, no length, no
breadth is seen there: how can I
tell you that which it is?

He comes to the Path of the Infinite
on whom the grace of the Lord
descends: he is freed from births
and deaths who attains to Him.

Kabir says: 'It cannot be told by
the words of the mouth, it cannot
be written on paper:

It is like a dumb person who tastes a
sweet thing—how shall it be ex-
plained?'

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXVII

III. 60. *cal haṃsā wā deś jahān*

O my heart! let us go to that country
where dwells the Beloved, the
ravisher of my heart!

There Love is filling her pitcher from
the well, yet she has no rope
wherewith to draw water;

There the clouds do not cover the sky,
yet the rain falls down in gentle
showers:

O bodiless one! do not sit on your
doorstep; go forth and bathe
yourself in that rain!

There it is ever moonlight and never
dark; and who speaks of one sun
only? that land is illuminate with
the rays of a million suns.

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXVIII

III. 63. *kahaiṇ Kabīr, suno ho sādho*

KABIR says: 'O Sadhu! hear my deathless words. If you want your own good, examine and consider them well.

You have estranged yourself from the Creator, of whom you have sprung: you have lost your reason, you have bought death.

All doctrines and all teachings are sprung from Him, from Him they grow: know this for certain, and have no fear.

Hear from me the tidings of this great truth!

Whose name do you sing, and on whom do you meditate? O, come forth from this entanglement!

He dwells at the heart of all things, so why take refuge in empty desolation?

KABIR'S POEMS

If you place the Guru at a distance
from you, then it is but the
distance that you honour:

If indeed the Master be far away, then
who is it else that is creating this
world?

When you think that He is not here,
then you wander further and
further away, and seek Him in
vain with tears.

Where He is far off, there He is un-
attainable: where He is near, He
is very bliss.

Kabir says: 'Lest His servant should
suffer pain He pervades him
through and through.'

Know yourself then, O Kabir; for
He is in you from head to foot.

Sing with gladness, and keep your
seat unmoved within your heart.

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXIX

III. 66. *nā maiñ dharmī nahīñ
adharmī*

I AM neither pious nor ungodly,
I live neither by law nor by sense,
I am neither a speaker nor hearer,
I am neither a servant nor master,
I am neither bond nor free,
I am neither detached nor attached.
I am far from none: I am near to
none.
I shall go neither to hell nor to
heaven.
I do all works; yet I am apart from
all works.
Few comprehend my meaning: he
who can comprehend it, he sits
unmoved.
Kabir seeks neither to establish nor
to destroy.

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXX

III. 69. *satta nām hai sab teṇ nyārā*

THE true Name is like none other name!

The distinction of the Conditioned from the Unconditioned is but a word:

The Unconditioned is the seed, the Conditioned is the flower and the fruit.

Knowledge is the branch, and the Name is the root.

Look, and see where the root is: happiness shall be yours when you come to the root.

The root will lead you to the branch, the leaf, the flower, and the fruit:

It is the encounter with the Lord, it is the attainment of bliss, it is the reconciliation of the Conditioned and the Unconditioned.

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXXI

III. 74. *pratham ek jo āpai āp*

IN the beginning was He alone, sufficient unto Himself: the formless, colourless, and unconditioned Being. Then was there neither beginning, middle, nor end;
-Then were no eyes, no darkness, no light;
Then were no ground, air, nor sky; no fire, water, nor earth; no rivers like the Ganges and the Jumna, no seas, oceans, and waves.
Then was neither vice nor virtue; scriptures there were not, as the Vedas and Puranas, nor as the Koran.
Kabir ponders in his mind and says:
‘Then was there no activity: the Supreme Being remained merged in the unknown depths of His own self.’

KABIR'S POEMS

The Guru neither eats nor drinks,
neither lives nor dies:

Neither has He form, line, colour, nor
vesture.

He who has neither caste nor clan
nor anything else—how may I
describe His glory?

He has neither form nor formlessness,
He has no name,

He has neither colour nor colourless-
ness,

He has no dwelling-place.

LXXXII

III. 76. *kahaiṇ Kabīr vicār ke*

KABIR ponders and says: 'He who
has neither caste nor country, who
is formless and without quality,
fills all space.'

The Creator brought into being the
Game of Joy: and from the word
Om the Creation sprang.

KABIR'S POEMS

The earth is His joy; His joy is the sky;

His joy is the flashing of the sun and the moon;

His joy is the beginning, the middle, and the end;

His joy is eyes, darkness, and light.

Oceans and waves are His joy: His joy the Sarasvati, the Jumna, and the Ganges.

The Guru is One: and life and death, union and separation, are all His plays of joy!

His play the land and water, the whole universe!

His play the earth and the sky!

In play is the Creation spread out, in play it is established. The whole world, says Kabir, rests in His play, yet still the Player remains unknown.

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXXIII

III. 84. *jhī jhī jantar bājai*

THE harp gives forth murmurous music; and the dance goes on without hands and feet.

It is played without fingers, it is heard without ears: for He is the ear, and He is the listener.

The gate is locked, but within there is fragrance: and there the meeting is seen of none.

The wise shall understand it.

LXXXIV

III. 89. *mor phakīrwā māngi jāy*

THE Beggar goes a-begging, but I could not even catch sight of Him.

And what shall I beg of the Beggar?

He gives without my asking.

Kabir says: 'I am His own: now let that befall which may befall!'

KABIR'S POEMS

LXXXV

III. 90. *naihar se jiyarā phāt re*

My heart cries aloud for the house
of my lover; the open road and
the shelter of a roof are all one to
her who has lost the city of her
husband.

My heart finds no joy in anything:
my mind and my body are dis-
traught.

His palace has a million gates, but
there is a vast ocean between it
and me:

How shall I cross it, O friend? for
endless is the outstretching of the
path.

How wondrously this lyre is wrought!
When its strings are rightly strung,
it maddens the heart: but when
the keys are broken and the strings
are loosened, none regard it more.

KABIR'S POEMS

I tell my parents with laughter that I
must go to my Lord in the morning;
They are angry, for they do not want
me to go, and they say: 'She
thinks she has gained such do-
minion over her husband that she
can have whatsoever she wishes;
and therefore she is impatient to
go to him.'

Dear friend, lift my veil lightly now;
for this is the night of love.

Kabir says: 'Listen to me! My
heart is eager to meet my lover:
I lie sleepless upon my bed. Re-
member me early in the morning!'

LXXXVI

III. 96. *jiv mahal men Śiv pahunwā*

SERVE your God, who has come into
this temple of life!

Do not act the part of a madman,
for the night is thickening fast.

KABIR'S POEMS

He has awaited me for countless ages,
for love of me He has lost His
heart:

Yet I did not know the bliss that
was so near to me, for my love was
not yet awake.

But now, my Lover has made known
to me the meaning of the note that
struck my ear:

Now, my good fortune is come.

Kabir says: 'Behold! how great is
my good fortune! I have received
the unending caress of my Be-
loved!'

LXXXVII

I. 71. *gagan ghaṭā ghaharānī, sādho*

CLOUDS thicken in the sky! O, listen
to the deep voice of their roaring;
The rain comes from the east with its
monotonous murmur.

KABIR'S POEMS

Take care of the fences and boundaries
of your fields, lest the rains over-
flow them;

Prepare the soil of deliverance, and
let the creepers of love and re-
nunciation be soaked in this shower.

It is the prudent farmer who will
bring his harvest home; he shall
fill both his vessels, and feed both
the wise men and the saints.

LXXXVIII

III. 118. *āj din ke main jāun balihārī*

THIS day is dear to me above all other
days, for to-day the Beloved Lord
is a guest in my house;

My chamber and my courtyard are
beautiful with His presence.

My longings sing His Name, and they
are become lost in His great beauty:

KABIR'S POEMS

I wash His feet, and I look upon His
Face; and I lay before Him as an
offering my body, my mind, and
all that I have.

What a day of gladness is that day
in which my Beloved, who is my
treasure, comes to my house!

All evils fly from my heart when I see
my Lord.

‘My love has touched Him; my
heart is longing for the Name
which is Truth.’

Thus sings Kabir, the servant of all
servants.

LXXXIX

I. 100. *kōi śuntā hai jñānī rāg*
gagan men

Is there any wise man who will listen
to that solemn music which arises
in the sky?

KABIR'S POEMS

For He, the Source of all music,
makes all vessels full fraught, and
rests in fullness Himself.

He who is in the body is ever athirst,
for he pursues that which is in
part:

But ever there wells forth deeper and
deeper the sound 'He is this—
this is He'; fusing love and
renunciation into one.

Kabir says: 'O brother! that is the
Primal Word.'

XC

I. 108. *main kā se būjhaun*

To whom shall I go to learn about
my Beloved?

Kabir says: 'As you never may
find the forest if you ignore the
tree, so He may never be found in
abstractions.'

KABIR'S POEMS

XC I

III. 12. *saṃskṛit bhāṣhā paḍhi līnhā*

I HAVE learned the Sanskrit language,
so let all men call me wise:

But where is the use of this, when I
am floating adrift, and parched
with thirst, and burning with the
heat of desire?

To no purpose do you bear on your
head this load of pride and vanity.

Kabir says: 'Lay it down in the dust
and go forth to meet the Beloved.
Address Him as your Lord.'

XCII

III. 110. *carkhā calai surat virahin kā*

THE woman who is parted from her
lover spins at the spinning wheel.

The city of the body arises in its
beauty; and within it the palace
of the mind has been built.

KABIR'S POEMS

The wheel of love revolves in the sky,
and the seat is made of the jewels
of knowledge:

What subtle threads the woman
weaves, and makes them fine with
love and reverence!

Kabir says: ' I am weaving the garland
of day and night. When my Lover
comes and touches me with His
feet, I shall offer Him my tears.'

XCIII

III. 111. *koṭīṇ bhānu candra tārāgaṇ*

BENEATH the great umbrella of my
King millions of suns and moons
and stars are shining!

He is the Mind within my mind: He
is the Eye within mine eye.

Ah, could my mind and eyes be one!
Could my love but reach to my
Lover! Could but the fiery heat
of my heart be cooled!

KABIR'S POEMS

Kabir says: 'When you unite love
with the Lover, then you have
love's perfection.'

XCIV.

I. 92. *avadhū begam deś hamārā*

O SADHU! my land is a sorrowless
land.

I cry aloud to all, to the king and the
beggar, the emperor and the fakir—
Whosoever seeks for shelter in the
Highest, let all come and settle
in my land!

Let the weary come and lay his
burdens here!

So live here, my brother, that you may
cross with ease to that other shore.
It is a land without earth or sky,
without moon or stars;
For only the radiance of Truth shines
in my Lord's Durbar.

KABIR'S POEMS

Kabir says: 'O beloved brother!
naught is essential save Truth.'

XCV

I. 109. *sāīṇ ke saṅgat sāsūr āī*

I CAME with my Lord to my Lord's
home: but I lived not with Him
and I tasted Him not, and my
youth passed away like a dream.

On my wedding night my women-
friends sang in chorus, and I was
anointed with the unguents of
pleasure and pain:

But when the ceremony was over, I
left my Lord and came away, and
my kinsman tried to console me
upon the road.

Kabir says: 'I shall go to my Lord's
house with my love at my side;
then shall I sound the trumpet
of triumph!'

KABIR'S POEMS

XCVI

I. 75. *samajh dekh man mīt piyarwā*

O FRIEND, dear heart of mine, think well! if you love indeed, then why do you sleep?

If you have found Him, then give yourself utterly, and take Him to you.

Why do you lose Him again and again?

If the deep sleep of rest has come to your eyes, why waste your time making the bed and arranging the pillows?

Kabir says: 'I tell you the ways of love! Even though the head itself must be given, why should you weep over it?'

KABIR'S POEMS

XCVII

II. 90. *· sāhab ham meṇ, sāhab
tum meṇ*

THE Lord is in me, the Lord is in you,
as life is in every seed. O servant!
put false pride away, and seek for
Him within you.

A million suns are ablaze with light,
The sea of blue spreads in the sky,
The fever of life is stilled, and all
stains are washed away; when
I sit in the midst of that world.

Hark to the unstruck bells and drums!
Take your delight in love!

Rains pour down without water, and
the rivers are streams of light.

One Love it is that pervades the whole
world, few there are who know it
fully:

KABIR'S POEMS

They are blind who hope to see it by
the light of reason, that reason
which is the cause of separation—
The House of Reason is very far away!

How blessed is Kabir, that amidst
this great joy he sings within his
own vessel.

It is the music of the meeting of soul
with soul;

It is the music of the forgetting of
sorrows;

It is the music that transcends all
coming in and all going forth.

XCVIII

II. 98. *ṛitu phāgun niyar ānī*

THE month of March draws near: ah,
who will unite me to my Lover?

How shall I find words for the beauty
of my Beloved? For He is merged
in all beauty.

KABIR'S POEMS

His colour is in all the pictures of the
world, and it bewitches the body
and the mind.

Those who know this, know what is
this unutterable play of the Spring.
Kabir says: 'Listen to me, brother!
there are not many who have
found this out.'

XCIX

II. 111. *Nārad, pyār so antar nāhī*

O NARAD! I know that my Lover
cannot be far:

When my Lover wakes, I wake; when
He sleeps, I sleep.

He is destroyed at the root who gives
pain to my Beloved.

Where they sing His praise, there I
live;

When He moves, I walk before Him:
my heart yearns for my Beloved.

KABIR'S POEMS

The infinite pilgrimage lies at His feet,
a million devotees are seated there.
Kabir says: 'The Lover Himself reveals the glory of true love.'

C

II. 122. *kōī prem kī peṅ jhulāo re*

HANG up the swing of love to-day!
Hang the body and the mind between
the arms of the Beloved, in the
ecstasy of love's joy:
Bring the tearful streams of the rainy
clouds to your eyes, and cover your
heart with the shadow of darkness:
Bring your face nearer to His ear, and
speak of the deepest longings of
your heart.
Kabir says: 'Listen to me, brother!
bring the vision of the Beloved in
your heart.'

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